

IV  
GROUNDS AND LIMITS  
OF SCHOPENHAUER'S PESSIMISM

I

SCHOPENHAUER compared his philosophy to Thebes with its hundred gates. Kuno Fischer sees only four gates: Kant, Plato, the Vedas, Buddha. The main door is the Kantian; it is as the one and true heir to Kant's crown that Schopenhauer ever proclaims himself, in opposition to the other post-Kantians. To Rosenkranz he writes: "I have taken only one step beyond Kant, but not up in the air, as all the acrobats of my time, but on firm and solid ground." His own chief claim as a technical philosopher was that he had solved Kant's problem of the thing-in-itself.

Schopenhauer's theory of knowledge accentuates Kant's phenomenalism. The world of our knowledge is a world in which the mind is at home, a world organized by the mind. No object without a subject; no subject without an object; the world is my idea. The naïve realist imagines that he sees, hears, smells, tastes, touches real, entirely extra-mental things, that he knows a world which exists as he knows it independently of his knowing it. Kant, admitting *that* things-in-themselves are, declares that we can never know *what* they are. All that we can know is in terms of space, time, causality.

This idealistic philosophy is in diametrical opposition to all substantialist metaphysics, materialistic or spiritualistic.

## 270 Aspects of Modern Pessimism

"Soul-substance", to Kant, is hollow sound without meaning; and we can rightly regard Kant also as the true and final destroyer of materialistic dogmatism. Materialism, Schopenhauer says, is a persistent attempt to set up a system of physics without metaphysics, to make the phenomenon the thing-in-itself. But "nothing can be more clumsy than that, after the manner of all materialists, one should blindly take the objective as simply given in order to derive everything from it without paying any regard to the subjective, through which, however, nay, in which alone the former exists." Man is the metaphysical animal. Physics is not metaphysics any more than indefinitely extended breadth is depth. "Those persons who believe that crucibles and retorts are the true and only source of all wisdom are in their own way just as perverse as were formerly their antipodes the Scholastics." To be sure those who peel the husks of nature may imagine they are dissecting its kernel; all of them ostensibly suitors of Penelope, they yet sleep contentedly in the house of Odysseus, each by the side of his chosen maid-servant, banishing all thought of the sovereign mistress.

This express repudiation of materialism and its votaries should be kept in mind; it is in agreement with Schopenhauer's theory of experience and with his Kantian inheritance. Notwithstanding a misleading materialistic bias which is manifest in Schopenhauer's metaphysical account of the intellect, it is clear that with historical materialism, and especially with the materialism of his own time, Schopenhauer would have no part and lot. The references to Büchner in his correspondence should leave little doubt as to his own attitude towards materialism, which he repeatedly called a philosophy for barbers' and apothecaries' apprentices. When he quotes Cabanis, when he treats the

intellect as a mere cerebral phenomenon, he is not to be confused with materialism, any more than when he calls the brain parasitic, a pensioner of the body and its highest efflorescence. The difference between Schopenhauer and materialism is radical: the latter would derive thought from matter, the immediately given from the mediately given, all the while forgetting that the matter of which it discourses is always necessarily object *of a subject*. But when Schopenhauer treats thought as a phenomenon of the brain, thought and brain, mind and body (themselves always correlative) must both be to him instruments and objectifications of *the* reality, which is the ultimate ground of them both and which transcends both subject and object.

We have now reached the point from which Schopenhauer would step beyond Kant. The thing-in-itself is neither matter nor mind, it is will. The world in its ultimate reality is not a system of intelligence nor a mechanical order of things; its inmost nature is best described by the analogy of our craving, driving, seeking character. Just as Hegel, conceiving of reality as the progressive self-organization of differences, and finding in the thought-process the most adequate and characteristic expression of this essential nature of all reality, chose "Thought" as his magic word, so Schopenhauer's radically different metaphysics leads him to call the ultimate reality "Will". That which sends the falling stone to the earth, the iron filings to the magnet, the sunflower towards the sun, the moth to the lighted candle is the same, and the same as that which sends the lover to the arms of his beloved. But this is nowise equivalent to "the insane opinion that the stone moves itself in accordance with a known motive, merely because this is the way in which will appears in man".

Will is that which is most immediate in consciousness,

## 272      Aspects of Modern Pessimism

and prior to the subject-object dualism; and like a magic spell, it unlocks to us the inmost being of all nature. It germinates in the plant; through it the crystal is formed and the magnetic needle turns to the North; it is manifest in chemical affinities, in repulsion and attraction, decomposition and combination, cohesion, gravitation. All these are different only in their phenomenal existence, but in their inner nature are identical. Organic or inorganic, conscious or unconscious, as the case may be, the will ever presses for its fulfilment, meeting impact with resistance, adapting means to end, responding to stimuli, seeking the gratification of instincts, acting on motives, on purpose, loving, hating, hoping, fearing, scorning, envying, enthusing, aspiring. Here is a teleology prior to and more ultimate than intelligence. "The bird builds the nest for the young which it does not yet know; the beaver constructs a dam the object of which is unknown to it; ants, marmots, and bees lay in provision for the winter they have never experienced; the spider and the ant-lion make snares, as if with deliberate cunning, for future unknown prey; insects deposit their eggs where the coming brood finds future nourishment. . . . The larva of the male stag-beetle . . . makes the hole in the wood for its metamorphosis as big again as the female does, in order to have room for its future horns."

Gills, claws, teeth, fins, wings, are all instruments of the will: the water pouch in the stomach of the camel, the sail of the nautilus, the eagle's far-seeing eye, the dog's keen nose. And likewise an instrument of the will is man's thinking power. Phenomenally, in terms of the subject-object dualism, the mind is the not-body; ultimately body and mind are objectifications and tools of the will-reality, elaborate means to attain its ends. What the snake does with its venom, the bird or the insect with its color mimicry, that

man accomplishes with his deliberately thought-out method of attack and defense.

## II

Ubiquitous and ever-active is the will—and it ever fails of final attainment. Eternal becoming and endless flux characterize its inmost nature; every attainment is only the beginning of a new pursuit. And right here is the seed sown of Schopenhauer's pessimism. For in man will is manifest as desire, and desire essentially insatiate. Will is want: its basis is need, deficiency; we want what we want, what we lack, and this consciousness of our lack is the kernel of suffering. "Pain," Schopenhauer wrote in 1817, "arises not from not-having, but from the desire to have, and yet not having." This desire for what we lack, unsatisfied, is pain; the desire satisfied is pleasure, which quickly passes into another painful state of further desire, or else into a more general sense of desires gratified, which is tedium.

We can clearly see, then, that from Schopenhauer's point of view pleasure is the exception, pain the rule in human life. Pain is the fundamental, positive, and primary; pleasure is negative and secondary, the temporary alleviation of pain. "I know accordingly no greater absurdity than that of most metaphysical systems which explain evil as something negative, while it is exactly the positive which is making itself felt." Ribot observes that here also Schopenhauer has learned from Kant, except that what Kant mentions only in passing his disciple has developed into an important doctrine. Will is effort, is desire, is painful. "The desire lasts long, the demands are infinite; the satisfaction is short and scantily measured out"; it is like the crust thrown to the beggar, that he may be hungry to-morrow

## 274 Aspects of Modern Pessimism

also. In the plants there is no sensibility, and no pain, but from the lowest animal life clear up the scale, as consciousness ascends, pain also increases: "He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." Not only is pleasure secondary and negative, impermanent: it is only a brief transition. Either the will reasserts itself in a new desire and a new pain, or life lapses into the dull sense of desires gratified, for desires that have been gratified are dust to him who can think of nothing further to spur him on. Life presents a more or less violent oscillation between pain and boredom. While the poor are ever battling with need, with pain, the rich are desperately at war with ennui. The illusory hope of real satisfaction sends rich and poor on the road, and the tramp meets the tourist. But on the road of craving desire no final satisfaction and no peace is to be found. "It is essentially all the same whether we pursue or flee, fear injury or seek enjoyment; the care for the constant demands of the will, in whatever form it may be, continually occupies and sways the consciousness; but without peace no true well-being is possible. The subject of willing is thus constantly stretched on the revolving wheel of Ixion, pours water into the sieve of the Danaids, is the ever-longing Tantalus."

Even if the pleasures of life were real and permanent, even if life yielded a balance of pleasure over pain, still life would fall short of justification, for the evil remains: my present well-being cannot undo my past suffering or the present and past suffering of others. As Petrarch says:

A thousand joys won't solace for one torment.

One beggar, one sick man, one corpse were enough for Gautama. But worse still: pleasure is mere froth and

vapor, like the wine provided by Mephistopheles in Auerbach's cellar, "after every sensuous pleasure we also say:

And yet methought I were drinking wine."

Life is a lie, and it is a wicked lie. Man is a creature of desire, and thus normally selfish. Egoism is limitless; man is bent on attaining the utmost of pleasure; whatever is in his way rouses his hate and his ruthless opposition. Were each person to choose between his own destruction and that of all other men, who can doubt what the decision would be in most cases? Each man regards himself the center of the world: "no sharper contrast can be imagined than that between the profound and exclusive attention which every person devotes to his own self, and the indifference with which, as a rule, all other people regard that self,—an indifference precisely like that with which he in turn looks upon them."

Politeness is but a screen which men have adopted for hiding the shameful sight of their real motives. But the least pressure pushes the screen aside and reveals our naked selfishness. Well might we pray, "lead us not into temptation: let us not see what manner of persons we are". A code of politeness is not enough; a corps of policemen is required to keep the peace. "The thousands that throng before our eyes, in peaceful intercourse each with the other, can only be regarded as so many tigers and wolves, whose teeth are secured by a strong muzzle." *Homo homini lupus.*

With Hobbes, Schopenhauer describes life as a war of each against all. Strife only reveals that variance with itself which is essential to the will. "The will to live everywhere preys upon itself, and in different forms is its own nourishment, till finally the human race, because it subdues

## 276 Aspects of Modern Pessimism

all the others, regards nature as a manufactory for its use." Crystals in process of formation meet, cross, and disarrange each other. The young hydra, while still joined onto the old, fights with it for food. Cut the Australian bull-dog ant in two—head and tail rush into battle. In Java Yung-hahn saw a plain as far as the eye could reach all covered with skeletons of large turtles, five feet long. On coming out of the sea to lay their eggs they are attacked by wild dogs, which, with their united strength, turn over the turtles, strip off the small shell of their stomachs, and devour them alive. But often then a tiger pounces upon the dogs. From this field of bones, turn to hundreds of other fields where some arch-fiend in the form of a conqueror has put hundreds of thousands of men opposite each other and said to them: "Shoot each other with guns and cannon!" And they have done so. History is the recital of wars, the peaceful years are but pauses between the cat-fights.

Normal and universal is selfishness, but the wickedness, the suffering may reach staggering extremes. The egoist seeks his own advantage and is ever ready to strike down all who oppose him; but cruel spitefulness leads men to strike down others for the pure joy of seeing others suffer. Caligula wished the whole world had but one single neck, so that he could sever it all at one blow. From these two sources spring the vices of men, the bestial vices of egoism: greed, gluttony, lust, selfishness, avarice, covetousness, injustice, hardness of heart, pride, arrogance, etc; the devilish vices of spitefulness: disaffection, envy, ill-will, malice, pleasure in seeing others suffer, prying curiosity, slander, insolence, petulance, hatred, anger, treachery, fraud, thirst for revenge, cruelty. "It is an array", Schopenhauer comments, "reminding one of the Princes of Darkness in Milton's Pandemonium." Life's everyday sordidness and



misery may not impress the callous spectator, "but one only needs to bring before his eyes the horrible suffering and misery on which even his own life is so clearly established, and the horror of it must certainly grip him: then indeed lead him through the infirmaries, military hospitals, and surgical chambers of torture, on through the prisons, through the Leads of Venice, the slave markets of Algiers, the torture chambers of the Inquisition, over the battlefields and through the judgment halls, unlock for him all the dark dwellings of misery where it creeps away from the gaze of cold curiosity, and finally from Dante read to him the death of Ugolino and his children from starvation in the tower and point out that this has really happened more than once," and then this world will disclose itself to him for what it really is—the scene of tormented and agonized beings who exist by devouring each other, each ravenous beast the living grave of others. Where did Dante learn about his *Inferno*? Optimism, theodicies, and all prattle about this best of all possible worlds are idle, and they are wicked, cruel sneers at the endless and unspeakable miseries of man.

This is human life: a hospital for incurables. If there be any purpose in life, it seems to be suffering. "Work, torture, trouble, and need is certainly the lifelong lot of almost all men." Men are like lambs gamboling in the meadow the while the butcher picks them over one by one. Life is as wretched as it is vile. Here is the blind mole, unweariedly digging with its shovel claws, from birth to death: to what purpose? To eat enough to engender another blind digger. And here is a cotton-spinner: a child of five he entered the factory and there has spent his life, performing the same mechanical labor, ten, twelve, fourteen hours a day, year in, year out: to what end is the

## 278 Aspects of Modern Pessimism

satisfaction of drawing breath thus dearly purchased? Life is a wretched jest, as Voltaire called it, and wisdom, ancient and modern, has agreed with him. From Homer and Sophocles and Euripides to Shakespeare and Byron and Leopardi, we hear the same sad refrain, and the old words of the Sage Bias still hold true: "Most men are bad." In all Homer Schopenhauer does not find one truly magnanimous character, although many are good and honest; and "in the whole of Shakespeare there may be perhaps a couple of noble, though by no means transcendently noble, characters to be found." "Abject selfishness, boundless avarice, well-concealed knavery, and also poisonous envy and fiendish delight in the misfortunes of others" are so universally prevalent that the slightest exception surprises us. But the optimist bids us: open your eyes and look at the world, how beautiful it is in the sunshine, with its mountains and valleys, streams, plants, animals, and so forth. "Is this world, then, a raree show?" Schopenhauer exclaims. "The world is glorious to look at, but dreadful in reality." Instead of inventing a hell in after-life, look about you: all the materials for hell are close at hand.

Past, present, and future are all one, progress is vain tedium. Life, essentially tragic, is in its details a sorry monotonous comedy: as in the dramas of Gozzi, the motives and incidents in each play are different, but the spirit is ever the same, and ever the same are the characters. "Pantaloone has become no more agile or generous, Tartaglia no more conscientious, Brighella no more courageous, and Columbine no more modest." Life does not *have* evils, it *is* evil; as Calderon says:

The greatest of man's sins  
Is that he was ever born.

Life is a bankrupt, a business that does not pay expenses; the will is an effort which frustrates itself. The less of life, the better; its brevity is its only virtue. This is the wisdom of Hamlet's soliloquy: "Our state is so wretched that absolute annihilation would be decidedly preferable". This, too, is Othello's judgment of life in his words to Iago:

I'd have thee live;  
For, in my sense, 'tis happiness to die.

So also Palmira to Mohammed in Voltaire's tragedy:

The world is made for tyrants; live and reign!

From all this torture is there no relief? Out of this dark cavern of illusion shines there no beacon light of enlightenment? From the craving weariness and the thirsty evil of life is there really no peace? We have heard the pessimistic verdict on life, wholesale and in detail: what is Schopenhauer's gospel of salvation?

### III

Like Ulysses who in all his many trials never wept, but burst into tears on hearing his early heroic exploits sung in the palace of the Phæacian king; or like that English client in court who wept as his case was set forth by his counsel and declared: "I never knew I had suffered half so much till I heard it here to-day", so the reader is apt to turn away from Schopenhauer's portrayal of life with Hamlet's words on his lips:

O that this too too solid flesh would melt,  
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!  
Or that the Everlasting had not fixt  
His cannon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!  
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable  
Seem to me all the uses of this world!  
Fie on't! ah fie! . . .

## 280      Aspects of Modern Pessimism

But suicide is not the way out, for the ground of all woe is the insatiate will-to-live, self-asserting desire. This desire the man who takes his own life does not deny or destroy. He is full of it; precisely the vehemence with which he wills life and rebels against suffering brings him to the point of destroying himself. "Just because the suicide cannot give up willing, he gives up living." But here is no salvation, for suicide registers the victory, not the defeat, of the tyrant will; the deliverance is altogether illusory, the will remains, only one of its individual manifestations has been destroyed. Deeper than individual life and death are the sources of woe in this world, and deeper and more radical the path of salvation. Not life is to be denied, but the will that is manifest in life, not the sufferings of existence, which the slave of desire finds intolerable, but its illusory joys are to be perceived and scorned and denied. In the midst of life, the desires of life and the will to live are to be curbed. Not death, cessation of life, but desireless peace, cessation of craving, is the blessed goal.

Here intelligence may come to our aid. Normally the intellect is a creature and tool of the will. In fact it is by virtue of his reason that man is the wicked animal: the brute's snarl is the response to an actual irritant, but man in revenge will harbor the evil resolve long after the original stirring of his wrath, will harbor it and with cold disdain will withstand the advances of tenderer emotions. So Mephistopheles speaks of man to whom the spark of divine light has been vouchsafed:

Er hat Vernunft, doch braucht er sie allein  
Um thierischer als jedes Thier zu sein.

Like a strong blind man, carrying on his shoulders the lame man who can see, even so are will and intellect. But

in exceptional instances the intellect may gain so clear and so profound an insight into the nature of things that it may gain temporary, habitual, permanent emancipation from the craving will. The man who can see may check for a moment the strong blind man's headlong rush, may turn his course round about, may stop it altogether.

The first way out of the bondage of desire is in artistic contemplation. Raised by the power of the mind, a man may relinquish the common way of looking at things as related to each other and to his own will and advantage; he may so lose himself in the object as to lose sight for the moment of his own individuality and will; his mind as a clear mirror of the object may become one with it. "Then that which is so known is no longer the particular thing as such; but it is the *Idea*, the eternal form, the immediate objectivity of the will at this grade; and, therefore, he who is sunk in this perception is no longer individual, for in such perception the individual has lost himself; but he is *pure*, will-less, painless, timeless, *subject of knowledge*." This is desireless contemplation, the æsthetic experience, the perception of the Platonic Ideas. Like the silent sunbeam that pierces through the rushing, aimless storm of craving passion is the steady glance of genius; the desire and the pursuit of particular things is like the rushing waterfall with its innumerable showering drops: the perception of art is like the rainbow gently resting on this raging torrent.

The intellect thus perceives clearly the world of will, itself being free for the moment from the miserable aims of self. The lofty dome embodies before his eyes the conflict between gravity and rigidity, burden and support: this is the essence of architecture. The beauty and grace of animal and human form is revealed in sculpture; in painting the rush and complexity of life is caught in a single moment of

## 282      Aspects of Modern Pessimism

time, and the spirit that has stifled self-will and passion breathes, calm and gentle, from the picture of the saint. Poetry reveals the essential life and character of man, in all his efforts and actions. It utters itself directly in the lyric; but the most profound insight of the poet discloses the unspeakable wail and woe of human life, its essential infelicity, the strife of will with itself, the triumph of evil, the scornful mastery of chance. This is Tragedy, the summit of poetic art, and through the contemplation of it all the deeper insight is attained: not that there are evils in life, but that life is an evil thing that had better not be. Tragedy thus prepares the way for that curbing and quieting of the will-to-live which leads to the ultimate release.

But highest of all the arts is music, which expresses, not the manifestations of the Will, but the Will itself, its secret history and "all its emotions and strivings, with their manifold protractions, hindrances, and griefs." The disquietudes of the heart, its desires and aversions, and its various degrees of relief are uttered in the alternate play of disquieting chords that rouse longing, and the more or less quieting and satisfying chords. Thus the major and the minor keys unlock to us the two basic moods of the soul, serenity, or at least healthiness, and sadness, or even oppression.

This is the liberating work of art: when thus lifted out of the endless stream of willing, the mind observes things "without personal interest, without subjectivity, purely objectively, gives itself entirely up to them so far as they are ideas, but not in so far as they are motives. Then all at once the peace which we were always seeking, but which always fled from us on the former path of the desires, comes to us of its own accord, and it is well with us. It is the painless state which Epicurus prized as the highest good

and as the state of the gods; we are for the moment set free from the miserable striving of the will; we keep the sabbath of the penal servitude of willing; the wheel of Ixion stands still."

Alas for the impermanence of this salvation! "So near us always lies a sphere in which we escape from all our misery; but who has the strength to continue long in it? As soon as any single relation to our will, to our person, even of these objects of our pure contemplation, comes again into consciousness, the magic is at an end. . . ." It is not enough to contemplate the inner nature of the will and woe: the momentary escape and relief from life is not enough; radical and permanent relief is needed. So art is to the man of insight, not a path out of life, but only an occasional consolation, "till his power, increased by this contemplation and at last tired of the play, lays hold on the real. The St. Cecilia of Raphael may be regarded as a representation of this transition." It is the transition from art to morality and to asceticism, from beauty to virtue and to holiness.

#### IV

Schopenhauer found in Buddhism the religious version of his philosophy; and in no other respect is his reliance on Buddhism so thorough as in his moral gospel of deliverance from self. The self-centered life is illusory and wicked: ignorance and misery spring from the same source. The Buddha, who preached peace through enlightenment, the saint who has banished the lure of self, has pricked the bubble of individuality; his life is a life of love because his mind has been emancipated from the illusions that breed selfishness. This in brief is also Schopenhauer's theory of morals. The only real mark of acts truly moral is the

## 284 Aspects of Modern Pessimism

absence of selfish motive; such deeds are actuated by interest in one's fellow beings, by pity for the suffering, sympathy with the cast down, justice and loving-kindness towards all. If the weal and woe of others affect my entire being so as to dominate my volition and motivate my deeds, then it is that compassion (*Mitleid*) enters, "the direct participation, independent of all ulterior considerations, in the sufferings of another, leading to sympathetic assistance in the effort to prevent or remove them". The compassionate man is just, he does not shift onto the shoulders of others the burdens which life brings to us all; but loving-kindness moves him rather to relieve the heavy-laden and lighten their load.

The egoist, the malicious man, looks at all the world from the point of view of his own self-centered individuality. An impassable gulf separates him from his neighbor. But the compassionate man has more or less completely effaced the distinction between his own interests and those of others; beneath the multiplicity of this our world of shadow-shape existence he has perceived the more profound and ultimate reality. "No suffering is any longer strange to him. . . . It is no longer the changing joy and sorrow of his own person that he has in view, as is the case with him who is still involved in egoism. . . . He knows the whole, comprehends its nature, and finds that it consists in a constant passing away, vain striving, inward conflict, and continual suffering. . . . Why should he now, with such knowledge of the world, assert this very life through constant acts of will, and thereby bind himself ever more closely to it, press it ever more firmly to himself? . . . The will now turns away from life; it now shudders at the pleasures in which it recognizes the assertion of life. Man now attains to the state of voluntary renunciation, resignation, true indifference, and perfect will-lessness."



"To be just, noble, and benevolent is nothing else than to translate my metaphysics into action." This is the ancient wisdom of the Upanishads: *Tat twam asi*, This thou art, and compassion is really the practical expression of an insight which passes understanding: "Every purely benevolent act, all help entirely and genuinely unselfish, being, as such, exclusively inspired by another's distress, is, in fact, if we probe the matter to the bottom, a dark enigma, a piece of mysticism put into practice; inasmuch as it springs out of, and finds its only true explanation in, the same higher knowledge that constitutes the essence of whatever is mystical."

Most rare and astounding is compassionate conduct, and profound are the experiences that may occasion it. Arnold von Winkelried, to open a way for his comrades, clasps in his arms as many hostile spears as he can grasp and rushes forward to his own death. Raymond Lully is admitted at last to the chamber of the fair lady he has long wooed, when she, opening her bodice, shows him her bosom frightfully eaten with cancer. From that moment, as if he had looked into hell, the passionate man goes to the desert to do penance. Suffering itself has sanctifying power; pain is the lye that purifies life. One path to salvation proceeds from perception and knowledge of the misery of life; a second path proceeds from great suffering itself.

"My whole philosophy," young Schopenhauer wrote, in 1817, "reduces itself to this: the self-knowledge of the Will." The keystone of all is resignation and denial of the will. Ethics and metaphysics are here one in a way radically different from Plato. The denial of the will is the practical expression of the insight into the heart of reality which is ultimate philosophical wisdom. This is wisdom: to perceive the nothingness of value in the universe; for this is

## 286 Aspects of Modern Pessimism

indeed the value of life, that it teaches us not to wish for it.

If we thus realize the metaphysical significance of compassion, we see that it leads beyond itself to something more thorough and final. Relieving the distress of life leads the moral saint to the resolve to relieve and be relieved of the essential distress, life itself. Thus compassion leads to asceticism. Just as the sexual passion is the supreme affirmation of the will to live, so voluntary chastity is its supreme renunciation. The man in the grip of sexual passion imagines that he is seeking his own highest fulfilment and gratification, and all the while he is but a tool of the will, fulfilling its end, the perpetuation of the species, the continuance of the wretched tragi-comedy of life. The ascetic has perceived the wretchedness of the tragi-comedy: he *will not play* any more, the will itself he has curbed within him, and its empire over him is at an end.

To such a profound insight into life, and to such heroic resolve, individual life or death are as indifferent as is life in general. Death is but the final payment of that debt which was contracted at conception and birth; and to each man death is the great reprimand: you have ever sought your own pleasure and advantage, but see, you are nothing lasting, you are nothing. From all the lusts of life the ascetic is free, a *contemptus mundi*, a supreme blessed indifference exalts him. "Everything is alike to me," Madame Guion writes, "I *cannot* will anything more: often I know not whether I exist or not." A sublime melancholy is the ascetic's, which is also a joy ineffable, far more profound than any condition of desire. The man who has divorced life itself and espoused chastity, scorns his own meat and drink. His appetites are all renounced and death to him brings no reprimand: he does not struggle to avert it, nor

does he violently seek it: voluntary starvation seals the denial which his every thought and act have signalized.

Before us is the thoroughgoing denial of all that is: "that constant strain and effort without end and without rest at all the grades of objectivity, in which and through which the world consists; the multifarious forms succeeding each other in gradation; the whole manifestation of the will; and, finally, also the universal forms of this manifestation, time and space, and also its last fundamental form, subject and object; all are abolished. No will: no idea, no world."

Schopenhauer's answer is famous: "That we abhor annihilation so greatly, is simply another expression of the fact that we so strenuously will life, and are nothing but this will, and know nothing beside it. . . . What remains after the entire abolition of the will is for all those who are still full of will certainly nothing; but, conversely, to those in whom the will has turned and has denied itself, this our world, which is so real, with all its suns and milky-ways—is nothing."

## V

"If we admit that all is will, that all will is effort, that effort attains its aim only in exceptional cases, and that all frustrated effort is pain, that life, that is to say pain, does not end with death; it follows that there is only one possible remedy, to suppress pain by suppressing life, by suppressing the will. And as the body is the will made visible, to deny the body through asceticism is to deny the will. Just as procreation perpetuates life and woe, so the suppression of it in chastity is a suppression of the species. Consequently the ideal which Schopenhauer proposed to mankind is a suicide *en masse* by metaphysical means. In logic,"

## 288 Aspects of Modern Pessimism

Ribot concludes his summary, "all this is very well. In reality it is another matter." It is the logic of the theory which we should first diagnose, for its well-being is on the surface. Our first question may be stated bluntly: how can the will deny itself? Or it can be expressed more systematically, with reference to Schopenhauer's philosophy: in a system of thorough-going pessimism what room is there for a doctrine of salvation? Or yet conversely: is a world which admits of salvation, even though it be through utter resignation, a world of wholly negative value?

Already in the forties Schopenhauer's earliest followers, —Becker, Frauenstädt—were worrying over the difficulty of reconciling the denial of the will with the universal necessity of motivation. If character is unchangeable, how is the conversion to saintliness possible? If all that takes place is determined ultimately by the will to live, then how can negation of the will take place? If the will-to-live is universally dominant, how is the ascetic's choice of voluntary chastity to be explained? If the intellect is but the tool of the will, like claw or beak or venom, how can the saint, at the apex of intelligence, deny the will altogether? Should we not perhaps postulate, in opposition to the self-assertive will and its subservient intellect, a higher will-denying intelligence and also a higher Will? Schopenhauer does not minimize the difficulty, but he does not meet it. He relies here on Kant's doctrine of the empirical and the intelligible character: the former is, of course, always necessarily determined, Schopenhauer would say, by the self-assertive will-to-live. "But the entire will-act, which is the *intelligible* character, as it in itself and atemporally *wills*, may just as well *not will*,—instead of a *Velle*, it may just as well be a *Nolle*." But is there no gradual attainment of saintly insight, a gradual approach to complete negation of

the will? Schopenhauer replies: This growing insight prepares, but does not bring about gradually the will-denial. Only when intelligence has reached its apex of exaltation, its boiling point, does this entirely new phenomenon, the denial of the will, take place. A wanderer pursues his course, lantern in hand. Suddenly he sees that he is at the brink of an abyss, and turns about. The wanderer is the will, the lantern is the intellect. The wanderer does not turn a little to the right or to the left; he turns completely about, he abandons his former course altogether. The conversion is radical, and it is sudden, not gradual. The empirical, will-determined character has not been mended, but ended and given up altogether. There is mystery in this deliverance from the will: repeatedly Schopenhauer quotes the words of Malebranche: "Liberty is a mystery." The peace of God passeth all understanding. This re-creation of man is what the Church calls a work of grace: we must be born anew. The natural man, the assertion of the will-to-live, is symbolized in Adam, but grace, the denial of the will, salvation, is in Christ, who is God incarnate. "Certainly the doctrine of original sin (assertion of the will) and of salvation (denial of the will) is the great truth which constitutes the essence of Christianity, while most of what remains is only the clothing of it, the husk or accessories." Jesus Christ is thus to Schopenhauer the symbol or personification of the negation of the will-to-live.

But the Christian mystery is not to be compared to Schopenhauer's. The enigma of evil in Christianity concerns creation, finite existence: in a universe grounded in Perfect Goodness how can evil be permanent, and why should it be at all? Dismal as is its view of the phenomenal world (original sin), Christianity is essentially and ultimately optimistic. Perfect in wisdom and goodness and power is

## 290 Aspects of Modern Pessimism

its ultimate reality, God, perfect and prevailing. But Schopenhauer's mystery is a mystery of good; we have heard of nothing but thorns and thistles in his philosophical garden, and, behold, grapes and figs are on his branches! Surely the trees, the roots of reality, have not been adequately perceived and described. Deeper and more ultimate than Schopenhauer's pessimism is his doctrine of salvation, deeper and more ultimate, and far more enlightening. The metaphysical significance of compassion and asceticism is more profound than Schopenhauer allowed: it reveals to us the more ultimate nature of the will-reality. "So then, behind the raw, unmoral will," we read in Volkelt, "a deeper will-kernel is hid: the morally significant will. . . . Now . . . we can perceive this will-to-live, which was proclaimed as the deepest reality, that it is a shell, behind which lurks the Will as a morally momentous power."

We are now on the way to perceive new meaning in the very contradictions of Schopenhauer's philosophy. The confusion in Schopenhauer's use of intelligence and will has been pointed out often enough. The will is blind, blundering, aimless, irrational, but it has manifested itself in and has for its tool purposive intelligence. But we should not be misled into mistaking confusion for final contradiction. Schopenhauer's philosophy is in many ways a drama of reality. Confused and discordant appear its characters at the outset; more and more fully are they revealed to us as we move to the climax. The four parts of Schopenhauer's *World as Will and Idea* are four acts of a drama—their order and sequence are not accidental and indifferent, nor are we moving on a plane. There is increasing depth and height, penetration and exaltation of insight as we proceed. Not only the audience or readers, the dramatist himself may learn about his characters, and it is poor criticism

to abuse an author because his characters go their own way and do not follow his own projected course for them. Tolstoy's men and women do not always conform to his text and sermons; they have characters of their own, and *Anna Karenina* is not the less great as a novel because Tolstoy finds Levin too real to manage. Enough if both author and reader, both dramatist and audience have been led to perceive new abysses in the human soul and in reality. All the greater is the novel or the drama because it has thus deepened our insight. Abstract consistency is not the sovereign virtue either in literature or in philosophy. Point out the discrepancy, the shift of viewpoints in the successive stages of Schopenhauer's philosophy, to be sure; but it were mere pedantry to rest satisfied with such criticism.

Consider the world of experience: is it not a phenomenal system of events in space and time, causally related and always involved in the subject-object dualism? But look more deeply: behind the phenomenal scheme, back of this Maya veil of experience is the blind, blundering, aimless Will; the rational shell holds an irrational kernel; intelligence is at the beck of desire; the will-driven soul is a slave of insatiate craving, miserable and wicked. This pessimistic metaphysics is not merely a substitute for the preceding idealistic theory of knowledge, not merely inconsistent with it: we witness here a grim expansion of thought, the dark recognition of the limitations of the phenomenal, the sense of unsounded, dismal depths, and profound despair. We are plunged in what seems impenetrable, whirling chaos that sweeps us resistlessly about and there seems no way out of the whirlpool and no beacon-light ahead. But a beacon-light does appear, and a way out, not to firm ground that eye can see or hand or foot can touch, but surely out of the whirlpool of will-driven desire. There is momentary

## 292 Aspects of Modern Pessimism

respite in art, there is the lasting quietism of compassion and chastity and Nirvana. For one to whom the whirlpool had been all-in-all, the out-of-it, to be sure, is bodiless, without content, nothing. When Schopenhauer says "we freely acknowledge that what remains after the entire abolition of the will is for all those who are still full of will certainly nothing," he is unconsciously criticising the finality of his own pessimism. For, these are the last words of *The World as Will and Idea*, "conversely, to those in whom the will has turned and has denied itself, this our world, which is so real, with all its suns and stars and milky-ways—is nothing." And *nothing*, narrow and inadequate, is likewise the view of things as essentially and hopelessly will-driven and irrational. Not only the will is at peace in the sublime moment of æsthetic contemplation, not only the will is curbed and negated by the moral saint: *the pessimism of Schopenhauer is also thereby curbed and negated*. The world is not so worthless if it includes souls that are pessimistic about it, that condemn it, and that seek and find a way out, be this way the way to apparent nothingness. Condemnation is not only the reverse of esteem: it is also its obverse. Even on Schopenhauer's premises a world which includes a Buddha, a *Theologia Germanica*, a Schopenhauer is not a world that warrants absolute pessimism. Thus Schopenhauer's æsthetics and ethics, running counter as they do to his pessimism, may teach us what they have not taught him: wisdom more final than his pessimism. They serve to indicate the limits of his pessimism, and therefore demand its radical revision.

The world whose nature has been disclosed to us in the whole of Schopenhauer's philosophy is certainly not a world which warrants docile, complacent optimism. It demands a heroic, perhaps a Zoroastrian view. But absolute,



hopeless gloom it does not demand nor warrant. Like Gautama, Schopenhauer had eyes to see darkness and a genius for gloom, but, like Gautama again, he sensed within himself enlightenment and the clear path of salvation. No philosopher has been more personal than Schopenhauer, according to Paulsen; none since Pascal, according to Ruysen. Out of the roots of his heart's agonies have sprung the ashen shoots of his pessimism. But Schopenhauer's philosophy is not objectively personal: it does not take due account of itself. The man who condemned the world confronted it disdainfully, but not disdaining himself; he who preached the vanity and tedium of attainment never doubting the lasting value of his own work. In all this he was inconsistent: had his judgment of the world explicitly included himself, Goethe, Plato, Kant, Beethoven, Rossini, Buddha, Arnold von Winkelried, Abbé Rancé, Madame Guion, it would have been different in its finality. Is the laurel crown a crown of thorns covered with leaves? Small reason for despair here, if man *will* have laurel crowns at any cost. The sun rises and shines on an earth in which there is as yet no life: "I am the sun and must rise because I am the sun: look on me who can!" Beautiful, green, and blooming is the oasis, and it bewails its lonely charms, spent as they are on the desert-waste. But the desert answers: "Were I no waste, thou wert no oasis!" Here are echoes from the agonies of Schopenhauer's own spirit, but they are not agonies of pure, absolute despair. The note of heroic worth is in them all.

The recognition of the personal element in Schopenhauer's view of life nowise justifies a treatment of his philosophy as a pathological phenomenon. With romantic intensity Schopenhauer perceived the tragic side of life, his own life affording him no lack of material. He could make no

## 294      Aspects of Modern Pessimism

reasoned sense of the tragedy, and his irrationalism is more rightly to be regarded as a conclusion from its pessimism rather than as its premise. Keenly conscious of supreme worth, philosophic, æsthetic, moral-mystical, he yet saw it as wholly alien in this vale of woe, and demanding for its full utterance the renunciation of the world. Hence his nihilistic gospel of salvation. The paradox and the inconsistency in Schopenhauer are fundamentally religious. Not without reason did Tolstoy call Schopenhauer "the most gifted of men", and as late as 1890 retained Schopenhauer's picture and no other in his room. Not without reason did Schopenhauer look to the opposite bank of the Main, to the house where five hundred years earlier a Frankfurter had written the *Theologia Germanica*. For is not this the Christian truth also, only outwardly inconsistent and paradoxical: man is a sinner tainted and wholly bad, yet he is also the son of God. "He is not in reality what he is as a matter of fact." His mind is a tool of the tyrant will, he is greed, lust, egoism, cruelty personified; but see, his is also disinterested, æsthetic contemplation, his is the pure intelligence that sees through the will, that curbs and denies the will, his the compassion, the chastity, the blessedness, the peace of the saint.

This paradox and mystery raise a still more ultimate one, which Schopenhauer recognizes, but renounces as wholly beyond his ken. *Why* this paradox and mystery? Whence is the great discord that permeates this world? If the roots of individuality go as deep as the assertion of the will to live, and are thus extirpated in the act of will-denial, then what would I be if I were not the will-to-live? Whence finally this will that may either assert itself, or be denied altogether? These are questions to which no answer may be given. Our minds are unsuited to deal with them.

"With our intellect, this mere tool of the will, we are everywhere striking upon insoluble problems, as against the walls of our prison." A knowledge of the very inmost being-in-itself of things, is thus unavailable, for it transcends the forms of knowledge and consciousness: "so much as to the limits of my philosophy, and indeed of all philosophy."

"Whatever torch we may kindle, and whatever space it may light, our horizon will always remain bounded by profound night." And at the conclusion of his lectures Schopenhauer quotes Lucretius:

In what a gloom of life, in what dire perils  
Are spent our years, however few they be!

The brighter the philosophical light that illumines the darkness of existence, the greater will the all-surrounding darkness disclose itself to be, and "the more intelligent a man is, the more keenly aware is he what darkness surrounds him, and just this stimulates him philosophically." *Why* this world has so much evil that thwarts and resists the good, why it is thus and not otherwise: is this no problem of ours? Goethe wrote in the album of a student, and Schopenhauer quoted to Adam von Doss: "The good God has indeed created the nut, but he has not also cracked it." And well it is so.

RADOSLAV ANDREA TSANOFF

